

<sup>a</sup> To the brave nobles of our land,

Both cities free and noble knight,  
Groan 'neath the tyrant princes'  
might; The nobles' substance  
they devour, And rob you of your  
rights and power."

Nay, "Karsthans," the peasant (who speaks in the spirit if not in the words of Hutten), shall lend a helping hand in the crusade in behalf of religious and political reform, for Karsthans, too, has his grievances (against the priests more especially), and is ready to rise at Sickingen's call.

Thus from these winter evening communings in the Ebern-burg there was finally evolved the plan of a general cataclysm, in which Franz should rise into dictatorial power as the leader of the laity against the clergy, the lower orders against the princes, the empire against the pope, a new Germany against the old. It was a great, but an impossible idea. The union of the knights and the cities was no more possible than the union of fire and water. Even if the Ritter and the burghers could have coalesced, they would have been no match for the princes and the magnates who had grown to greatness at their expense, waxed strong through their weakness. The petty sovereign had become a fixture in the empire. Nevertheless, Sickingen and Hutten were resolved to try the experiment, and the condemnation of Luther at Worms had nearly precipitated the struggle. Hutten hurled threat on threat from the Ebernburg at the enemies of the gospel and the Fatherland, and sent missive on missive to the reformer exhorting him to stand fast. Sickingen would not move just yet, however, for he had hopes of playing a *role* under the imperial banner, and had not lost sight of his personal advantage in the midst of these visionary schemings. But after the unsuccessful expedition against France on Charles' behalf, for which his imperial patron left him to pay, and the consequent friction between them, the mine, which Hutten had so laboriously laid, exploded at last in August 1522.

The explosion was, as might have been foreseen, but a puny display of knightly fireworks. It looked ominous at first. In August the nobles of the Rhineland met at Sickingen's summons at Landau to resolve to stand the princely